DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 087 456 IR 000 200

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TITLE	Children of the Four Winds: The Migrant Student Record Transfer System.
INSTITUTION	Arkansas State Dept. of Education, Little Rock.
PUB DATE	Apr 73
NOTE	7p.; Paper presented at the Association for Educational Data Systems Annual Convention (New Orleans, Louisiana, April 16 through 19, 1973)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Computer Oriented Programs; Information Systems; *Migrant Child Education; *Migrant Children; *Migrant Education; Program Descriptions; Rural Education; *Student Records
IDENTIFIERS	AEDS; Association for Educational Data Systems; *Migrant Student Record Transfer System; MSRTS

ABSTRACT

A discussion of the computerized Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS) is presented. The author first describes it as a functional automated system, headquartered in the Arkansas Department of Education, which serves the record transferral needs of seasonal farm migrant children as they move throughout the contiguous 48 states. Eligibility for MSRTS services is defined, classifications of migrants are outlined, and salient characteristics of farm migratory children are mentioned. The final section of the paper reviews the funding which supports MSRTS, lists the major services of and benefits derived from the system, and discusses the measures built into the system to safeguard the privacy of sensitive information. (PB)

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CHILDREN OF THE FOUR WINDS: THE MIGRANT STUDENT RECORD TRANSFER SYSTEM

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INTRODUCTION

It is the intent of this paper to present the Migrant Student Record Transfer System as a functional automated system that serves record transferal needs of seasonal farm migrant children as they move from school to school in the contiguous 48 states of this nation. It is also intended to show why a special national effort is needed in order to offer these children an optional way of life.

This paper is divided into two major sections. The first section basically describes some aspects of the nature of farm migrants. The second section presents some aspects of the Migrant Student Record Transfer System.

WHAT IS THE MIGRANT STUDENT RECORD TRANSFER SYSTEM?

The Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS) is a computerized student record depository with an associated telecommunications network that serves the forty-eight contiguous states of the U.S. The purposes of the System are to collect, store and disseminate pertinent data on seasonal farm migrant children as they move from school to school throughout this nation.

MSRTS is headquartered in the Arkansas Department of Education in Little Rock, Arkansas. Since the beginning of the System in July, 1969, it has used the computer at the UNIVERSITY OF Arkansas Medical Center for the data base. There are 137 teletype terminals located in 44 states. The remaining four states are served by terminals in neighboring states.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES OF MSRTS?

Presently only seasonal farm migrant children may be served by MSRTS. A "migrant child" is generally defined as a child, within the ages of five through seventeen inclusive, of a migratory agricultural worker who has moved from one school district to another during the past year with a parent or guardian who was seeking or acquiring employment in agriculture including related food processing activities such as canning.

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WHO IS A MIGRATORY AGRICULTURAL WORKER?

A migratory agricultural worker is an adult worker who is employed in seasonal agricultural or related food processing occupations, and who is required by the nature and varied locations of his employment to move from place to place for the purpose of engaging in his occupation.

Classification of Migrants

For purposes of allocating funds by the U.S. Office of Education there are two classes of migratory children: the intrastate and the interstate migrant child. The intrastate migrant child moves with his parents or guardians from one school district to another school district within a state. The interstate migrant child moves with his parents or guardians from a school in one state to another school in a different state.

A third class of migratory child is known as the five-year migrant. This is a child who has ceased to move and has "settled out" of the migrant streams. States do not receive funds for services to these children but may provide personal, educational and health services provided the programs are designed for the intrastate or interstate children.

The three classifications of migratory children are defined in P.L. 89-750 of 1966 which established the migrant education category of funds which is an amendment to Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Services could have been rendered to the migratory children under ESEA I but it became primarily an urban program and the problem of farm migrancy is almost exclusively rural in nature. Therefore, Congress felt a need to earmark some funds to be used solely for enhanced educational opportunities for the farm migrant children of this country.

Some Characteristics of Farm Migratory Children

For the most part, these children are Spanish-Americans, Negroes and Anglos with a small percentage of Puerto Ricans who come primarily to the East coast. A great majority of all migrants are of Spanish descent.

These children are generally born without the benefit of prenatal care and are usually delivered by a midwife (1, p. 11). Some reasons for this are lack of money, constant travel and superstitions.

The young baby sleeps with his mother for the first few months and then is usually entrusted to the care of an older sister or brother who many times is no more than five to six years of age while the mother works (4, p. 471).

During the first few years of life the migrant child, as do other children, become a product of his environment which is considerably different from the non-migrant world. One of the prime characteristics in viewing the migrant child is the family mobility. As a result of his family's constant moving from place to place, the child can begin to sense both insecurity and instability from his family and his changing environment. Sutton points this out by saying, "Mobility creates feelings of frustrations for migrant children. They feel the impact of having made repeated adjustments to new situations. They feel loneliness which stems from frequently moving into new areas. 'I get homesick when I move away. Like now, I'm so homesick I could die. It's no fun when I have to move away.'" (5, p. 26)

The migrant child's environment is often characterized by some of the following:

Inadequate Income: Inadequate income for the basics of life: food, shelter, clothing, medical and dental care, sanitation, etc. is commonplace. The average annual family income of farm migrants is said to be around $1,400. One description of living conditions was given by the New York State Department of Education: "There are employers who provide adequate housing for the migrant, but many migrants live in poor and crowded accommodations. They live in discarded transit buses, tar paper shacks, crowded barracks and abandoned houses. Outside water taps, hand pumpwells and outdoor toilets are common as is a lack of adequate cooking, lighting and heating facilities. In the poorly equipped accommodations there is usually inadequate window space and screens are scarce. Sanitary conditions are often poor for no provision may be made for garbage disposal. The crowded conditions contribute to disorderliness and untidiness. Dishes, knives and forks and cooking utensils are at a minimum. Refrigeration, shelves, closets and eating space are frequently unavailable or inadequate" (3, p. 9).

Health: Among the most critical situations facing migrant children is the health problem. Coles reports of high infant mortality rates, tooth decay, poor vision, faulty hearing, valvular heart diseases, parasitic diseases and vitamin deficiencies based on faulty eating habits, chronic diarrhea, chronic fungal diseases of the skin, chronic tuberculosis, veneral diseases, uralogical disorders and nerve palsies. These are but a few of the illnesses and diseases that run rampant among migratory children (1, p. 21). The infant mortality rate among migrant children is 125% higher than the national average. Infectious diseases are 260% higher than the national average and the accident rate is 300% higher.

Self-Concept: As the migrant child grows and sees the world around him, he begins to acquire the attitudes and values of his parents. The child's self-concept or image of himself gradually begins to take on the characteristics of his parents. Constant mobility brings on a state of friends in school only to lose them when the family relocates. He lives in a culture which forces him to assume duties which children outside his culture may not experience until the 18th or 19th year.

He must raise his younger brothers and sisters, prepare meals and contribute to the family earnings. He learns to continually worry about the next move and the next mouthful of food.

The migrant child knows rejection by non-migrant groups. Migrant children come from economically and culturally deprived groups. They belong to no community. Wherever they go they are made to feel inferior. The comment often heard by farmers is that they anxiously await the migrant's arrival but are equally as glad to see him go when harvest is over. In school the migrant child stands out from the other children. His clothes are worn; he doesn't speak as well as the other children. According to Sutton, the "child soon learns that he is a nobody" (5, p. 24).

Cultural Deprivation: Among the furnishings in a migrant home, a television set and a radio are sometimes included, rarely do children have reading materials such as books, newspapers and magazines. He lacks experience which most middle-class children have. In most migrant families there is a definite lack of language skills. Parents, having little education themselves, are unable to assist in the communicative skills received by most middle-class children. Bernstein points out that among lower class and culturally deprived groups that "conversations are limited to the immediate instant and generally do not include time sequences, relationships between concepts, logical sequences, or casual relationships" (6, p. 213).

Frost states, "Deprived of cultural experiences which contribute much to success in schools, these children are frequently destined for failure in schools and become misfits in adult living. Thus the vicious cycle proliferates."

Community youth organizations generally do not offer their services to migrant youth. This may or may not be deliberate. Perhaps community insensitivity to the needs of migrant youth is the cause.

MSRTS OPERATION: A SERVICE TO MIGRANT CHILDREN

Origination

Even though the U.S. Congress mandated that a system of data transferal be developed as a part of special services to migrant children funded through USOE, the Migrant Student Record Transfer System was initiated by 37 states in conference in Phoenix, Arizona, in February, 1969. A committee known as the Record Transfer Committee composed of nine states was appointed to (1) design a student record form acceptable to the 48 states and (2) design a system to transmit the data.

In June, 1969 by competitive bid, the Arkansas Department of Education received a contract with the U.S. Office of Education to develop and operate the System. FY 70 was used in designing and developing the MSRTS. In September, 1970 the process of phasing the states into the System was begun and was completed during the following summer. We now have approximately two years of full scale operation for all participating states.

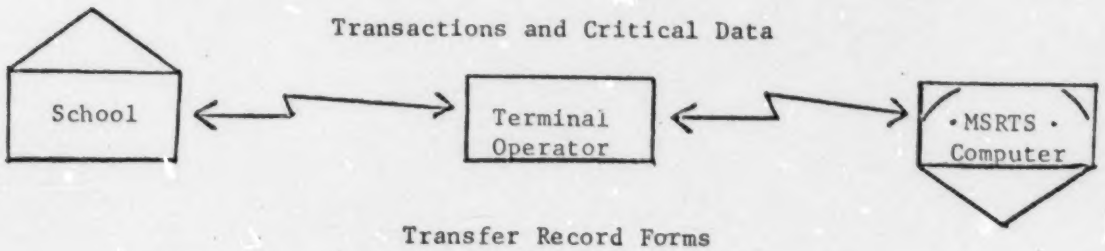
Organizational Structure

The figure below shows the functional relationships of the various entities in MSRTS:

USOE ⟶ ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (MSRTS) ⟶ PARTICIPATING STATES

Flow of Information

The figure below shows the flow of student data in MSRTS:



There are three basic communication elements in MSRTS: Schools, terminal operators and the computer in Little Rock Arkansas. Schools initiate all data that is entered into a student's data base record. They and the state departments of education are the recipients of individual student data. Two kinds of printed reports are sent from MSRTS. A subset of the complete record is sent by wire to the terminal operator who in turn communicates with the school in which the student is enrolled. The purpose of this report is to give the school personnel some information on a rapid basis relative to the health and academic status of the child.

The other report is the Uniform Migrant Student Transfer Form (Transfer Record) which is the cumulative record. This record is mailed to the designated agency in the state for receiving mail for each respective school. This is usually the local school office or a central school district office. The Transfer records are usually sent from MSRTS office the day after requests are received from the terminal operators.

The terminal operators serve as an intermediate agency between the schools and the computer. There are 219 terminal operators plus approximately 80 backup terminal operators serving the System. The terminal operators transact the business for the schools with the computer and receive responses from the computer which they interpret for the schools.

The computer processes critical data twice daily. Once at noon CST and at night. The noon processing is sent to the terminals during the afternoon of the same day. The night processing is sent early the next morning. The transfer records are printed each night for mailing the next day.

FUNDING

Funding for MSRTS is provided through a contract between the U.S. Office of Education and the Arkansas Department of Education. The funds are set aside from the top of Migrant Program funds to be spent on a cost reimbursable basis.

SOME SERVICES OF MSRTS

The staff of MSRTS performs the following services:

1. Yearly contract proposal development, negotiation and execution
2. On-site visits (an average of two per year) to terminals to give needed assistance
3. Daily monitoring of all terminals for volume and efficiency control
4. Provide all computer services
5. Blank and printed student Transfer Record Forms
6. Mailing of student Transfer Record Forms to schools
7. Provides a recommended total system operation from computer to school
8. Develops and provides training materials for states
9. Develops and provides operational manuals for terminal operators and school users
10. Provides monthly, quarterly and annual activity reports to USOE and the states
11. Provides training for all terminal operators and back-up terminal operators, other state personnel and a support role in training at the local school level
12. Works with USOE and state agencies on operational development problems related to MSRTS

13. In-servie training for MSRTS staff
14. Monitors users' needs and modifies System accordingly with USOE approval.

SOME BENEFITS OF MSRTS

The following is offered as a partial list of benefits derivable from the information and services provided to the states by MSRTS.

1. Rapid transmittal of pertinent general, health and academic student data for rapid programming for students
2. Information for placement and care of children:
   A. School attendance patterns
   B. Parent/guardian relationship to student
   C. Kinds of health screening exam(s) administered and when
   D. Health screening findings and subsequent treatments (if any)
   E. Urgent health conditions
   F. Status of treatment procedures
   G. Inoculations administered and needed
   H. Students' chronic health conditions
   I. Standardized test(s) administered, date and score(s)
   J. Special educational programs of student involvement encourages program continuity
3. Encouragement for more attention to program development
4. Encourages positive attitudinal changes toward problems and needs of migrant children
5. One agency responsible for accumulation, storage and dissemination of pertinent data on seasonal farm migrant children.
6. Provides data for establishing an empirical method of distributing funds to states for student programs and services.
7. Provides a vehicle for interstate cooperation in the education of agricultural migrant children.
8. Provides statistics to USOE and the states for program planning and budgeting and for better understanding of the nature of farm migrancy.
9. Monthly newsletter.

SAFEGUARDS

It is appropriate that some mention of safeguards of private information be mentioned. The designers (a committee of nine states and the MSRTS staff) of the Migrant Student Record Transfer Form and the Automated Migrant Student Record Transfer System were very mindful to design and develop a total system that would assure privacy of data. The System as it was designed has met all standards as established by the U. S. Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights chaired by Senator Sam Erwin of North Carolina.

In summary I would say that the Migrant Student Record Transfer System is the first and only functional automated System serving the field of education on a nationwide basis. It is now functional and is currently serving approximately 350,000 farm migrant children in transferal of pertinent school and health data. Additionally it provides summary statistical data for states and USOE for management, planning and evaluation purposes. This System is one demonstration of the capability of automation to serve human needs beyond form letters and monthly bills. Your interest is sincerely appreciated and I hope that the migrant education administrators in your respective states will extensively utilize your expertise in developing their own understandings of the world of automation.

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